Mercy

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Mercy

by orphan_account

Summary

He is not going to interfere, he tells himself. He just wants to see. He just wants proof.

From this suggestion in the Stancest Discord chat: “Grunk!Ford showing up right after teen!Stan breaks his science project to choke/hate fuck him.”

Not long, now. Ford waits, perfectly still. Seven types of security drones would bypass him without a blip; a human boy doesn't stand a chance. The gymnasium is muffled, dark and subdued. The displays line the floor like tombs, neat rows of tables with projects that might be dark flowers drooping in front of half-hearted epitaphs.

He hears Stanley before he sees him. He's talking to himself, agitated; the sound of crunching and crinkling from his toffee peanuts makes Ford grit his teeth. He is not going to interfere, he tells himself. He just wants to see. He just wants *proof.*

Stan stops in front of Ford's project. Ford can see the outburst before it happens, and braces himself, his jaw clamped so tight it hurts. "This is all *your* fault, you dumb machine!" Stan's hand lands like a sledgehammer on the table.

On the table, some distant part of him thinks.

Something is breaking in Ford; the smoke hissing off of the machine is a part of him; Ford is spitting sparks. If he does not move, a part of him will grind to a halt; he does not want to know what will be left in its place.

"Oh no – oh no, no, what did I do?" Stan is panicking, his voice cracking; Stan is fumbling with the exhaust panel. He is trying to – to fix it.

Ford is behind him before he knows what he's done. He swings. The strike connects over Stan's ear and Stan staggers with a shout. Stan crashes into the table with his own project; the football monstrosity topples to the floor. "You *idiot!"* Ford shouts. "You blithering, mind-numbingly *moronic – "*

That's right, Ford thinks, in the split second before Stan's fist connects. Stanley is a fighter.

And Stan hits *hard.* He knocks Ford flat on his ass with an uppercut so fast Ford doesn't have time to react. Ford's metal plate dings against the linoleum; white lights burst behind his eyes. He can taste blood. Stan screams something. All of a sudden, the whole thing is overwhelming, his mind like so much static, like it was in the worst days, before the end, when he never slept – but this time, in all that noise, there is a deep, old anger to steady him, and pain to fuel that anger, and Stan, standing over him, *physical.* Ford can act on him, as Stan has acted on him.

Ford lunges. He catches Stan in the stomach and they both bang into the ground, Stan still hollering. He goes down swinging, striking every inch of Ford he can, but Ford has the upper hand, now, dizzy though he is. He's been fighting longer than Stan's been alive.

It doesn't take long for Ford to wrestle Stan onto his knees and put him in a choke hold. That's not the end of it – Stan slams his elbow into Ford's chest, once, twice, three times before he's too dizzy from being choked. He fumbles, clawing at Ford's arm, and starts to whimper.

“Tap out,” Ford says. Once the words are out, he doesn’t know why he’s said it – doesn’t know if it’s out of mercy, or out of the desire to see Stan humiliated by his defeat. Maybe both. When Stan doesn’t, Ford tightens the arm around Stan’s neck and repeats the order.

Stan taps Ford’s arm. Ford bends him forward until his hands can touch the ground, then relaxes his hold on Stan’s throat without releasing him entirely. Stan starts to shudder and wheeze, sucking in huge gasps of air that rumble against Ford’s chest. Ford is aware of the smell of Stan, so familiar he might’ve been with him just an hour ago before coming here. He is aware of the hot weight of his brother’s body under him, trembling.

He is aware of the way his erection is pressing against Stan’s back.

Once Stan can speak, he spits out an incoherent string of curse words. He starts to struggle again, but weakly, and stops again when Ford tightens his arms. “You selfish, short-sighted little boy,” Ford says. “You have *no clue* what you cost me. What you cost *the world.”*

“Wh…Ford? Stanford?”

Ford scrapes his teeth against the back of Stan’s neck. Stan flinches, and the movement makes his ass grind against Ford’s erection – he seems to realize what it is, and flinches again, starts to struggle. Ford tightens his arms, and Stan whines. The noise chokes out of him. His face darkens. Ford starts to grind against Stan with rough, erratic thrusts of his hips. He smells so good, Ford thinks, all fear-sweat and the aftershave they used to share. Ford swallows, and relaxes his grip again. Stan catches his breath again; it sounds like he’s crying, weakly, his face is sweat-slick, spit on his chin.

“I could’ve been something,” Ford says.

“Stanford, I…is – is it really – “

“I might not have ever met him,” Ford says, louder.

“Ford, let me go – Ford, you’re – you’re freaking me out!”

“*You took my life from me!”*

Stan elbows Ford in the face; his nose cracks and blood spurts onto Stan’s white shirt. Ford shouts in pain. It’s enough – Stan shoves him off and scrambles back, his shoes squeaking on the floor. Ford holds his nose, letting the sudden wave of pain and nausea pass over him. For a moment, the only sound in the gymnasium is the echo of their breaths, laced with the soft noises of pain they’re both making, almost identical.

Ford lifts his head and looks at Stan. He’s pale, his shirt sticking to him with sweat, a splatter of blood soaking into his shoulder. He looks terrified. He looks like a child. Ford struggles to hold onto his anger – *he was going to burn your journal; he ruined your life; he is pathetic* – but all he can think of, suddenly, is the panicked way Stan fumbled with the machine, trying to fix it. All he can hear in his mind is Stan, desperate: *What do I do?*

Ford's mind goes quiet and still. His anger is gone. He was right to want to cling onto it, because all that is left is a hollow place in him. "Why?" he asks, weakly. "Why?" His throat is tight. He wants, very badly, to press his nose into the hollow of Stan's throat and breathe him in again.

Stan stays where he is, breathing hard, rattled. "B-back atcha," he says, finally. Then, tentatively: "Ford?"

"Yes," Ford says. "It's me, Stanley. It's me." Stan sits on his knees, then hesitates. Ford takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. When he opens them, Stan is close, one hand lifted as if to touch Ford. "Don't," Ford says.

Stan sits back and rests his hand on his knee. "So…" He swallows. "I guess we didn't sail around the world."

"No," Ford says.

Stan lowers his head. "…you gonna kill me?" he asks.

"No," Ford says, gently.

"You gonna choke me out again?"

"Maybe," Ford says.

That actually makes Stan laugh – it wasn't supposed to. Stan runs a hand through his hair. "Man, you are fucked," he says. "Like, really fucked."

"You have no idea," Ford says. Then, as if admitting it has wrenched something loose in him, Ford begins to weep. He drops his glasses to the floor and presses the heels of his hands into his eyes. For some time, Stan says nothing and doesn't move – it doesn't matter, Ford thinks. He'll be gone, soon. This boy can watch him break down; he can judge him however he sees fit. Then, Stan edges closer, so he's sitting next to Ford, and wraps an arm around his shoulders.

"Hey," he says, lamely. "Hey…Sixer…c'mon. Don't make it weird."

And that, of all things, wrenches a laugh out of Ford, genuine and surprised. He lifts his head and looks at Stan. "What?" he says, his voice thick still with tears. "Don't make it *weird?"*

"Yeah," he says. "I mean, the angry boner wasn't weird, but this is."

Ford laughs again, harder this time. He shoves Stan away from him and wipes at his face, wincing when his hand touches his nose. He picks up his glasses, wipes them off on his shirt, and puts them on. "Stan, I…"

"Can we fix it?" Stan asks. "Y'know…" He gestures vaguely at Ford. "Your fashion sense?" Ford punches Stan in the arm, then regrets it – but Stan just winces and laughs. "What?" Stan says. "I mean, do they not have mirrors in the future, or…?"

“I’m reconsidering choking you out,” Ford says.

“Fair enough.” Stan shrugs. “But…seriously, is it…is it too late? For you? For him?”

“Maybe,” Ford says, and looks at the perpetual motion machine, still swinging slowly. “I think it is, for me,” he says. He stands, grunting in pain. The movement makes another spell of dizziness come over him, and he stands very still, letting it pass. Stan stands with him, close, never having known what it’s like to stand apart from Ford. They both study the perpetual motion machine in silence. “But not for him,” Ford says, finally.

They move to the table together; they stand over it together. Ford touches Stan’s shoulder. “Listen to me carefully,” he says. “Are you listening?”

“Yeah.” Stan jams his hands in his pockets.

“If Ford says anything about going to Gravity Falls, anything at all – go with him. And if he starts talking about…a muse, or anything like that – ask him…” Ford trails off, wondering what could possibly get through to him. “Ask him to tell you what he knows about Pandora’s box, and who might want it opened. Do you understand?”

“No,” Stan says, rocking back and forth. “Pandora’s box?”

“Repeat what I said to me,” Ford says. He opens the exhaust panel and leans in, dripping blood on the table.

“Alright. If Ford wants to go to, um, Gravity Falls, hide in the trunk of his car. If he starts getting weird about Greek stuff, ask him about more Greek stuff. That about right?”

“I said repeat it,” Ford says. He takes a flashlight out of a pocket and shines it in, searching for the blown fuse that he can barely remember, now, the memories lost in the haze of grief and anger that followed him back then.

“If you start talking about a muse, ask you to tell me what you know about Pandora’s box, and who wants it opened.”

“There you go,” Ford says. “Good. Very good.” He lifts his head. “You should go home,” he says. “I’ll take care of this. And, Stanley – Stanley…” He straightens up and puts a hand on Stan’s shoulder. He’s not sure if he hates it or not that Stan doesn’t flinch, that Stan still trusts him, wholly, after all of this. “I…” The words won’t come. He swallows, and tries again.

Stan punches his chest, lightly. “I get it,” he says. “It’s okay.”

Ford nods, his jaw tight. “Go on,” he says. “And…good luck, Stan.”

Stan doesn’t leave right away, lingering as Ford sets to work. It’s not long, however, until the sound of his shoes squeaks in the quiet gym, grow quiet, and quieter still. Ford shuts his eyes and listens as Stan walks away from him, out of the gym, out into a brighter future. He hopes that there is room enough in the multiverse for mercy, just this once. Just this once would be enough.

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